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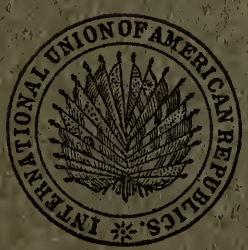
INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF AMERICAN REPUBLICS
JOHN BARRETT, DIRECTOR
FRANCISCO J. YÁNES, SECRETARY

MUNICIPAL ORGANIZATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

MEXICO CITY

(Reprint of an article from the Monthly Bulletin of the International Bureau of American Republics, February, 1909)



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MUNICIPAL ORGANIZATION IN LATIN-AMERICAN CAPITALS

THE CITY OF MEXICO.

THE IDEA of a Federal District not included within the area or jurisdiction of any of the States forming the Union, which district is set apart as the seat of the National Government, is fundamental in each of the five Republics of North and South America whose form of government is that of a federal union of independent States.

THE NATIONAL PALACE, CITY OF MEXICO.

This turreted and bastioned edifice, 675 feet long, faces the east side of the main plaza. The far corner contains the executive offices. Besides housing other departmental offices, the building provides chambers for the National Congress and the Central Meteorological Observatory. The palace occupies the site of Cortez's residence during the early days of the conquest, and was commenced in 1692.

These five Republics, to give them their full designations, are the United States of America, the United Mexican States, the Argentine Nation, the United States of Brazil, and the United States of Venezuela. The capital cities of Washington, Mexico, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, and Caracas are each located in a Federal District

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under direct Federal control. They are all small in area, although the District of Columbia is by far the smallest of the five.

The Mexican Federal District has a population of 576,000, and lies to the southeast of the Valley of Mexico and is irregular in shape. At its greatest length it measures about 30 miles and at its greatest breadth about 25 miles. Its area is about 578 square miles (1,498.75 square kilometers).

This is more than eight times the size of the District of Columbia, less than half the size of Rhode Island, and one and three-fourths the size of greater New York.

A HOLIDAY PROCESSION IN MEXICO CITY.

The two great national holidays of Mexico are May 5 and September 16, the former commemorating the victory over the French at Puebla in 1862, and the latter the patriot uprising under Hidalgo in 1810, which resulted in the establishment of a Republic.

For purposes of administration the Mexican Federal District is divided into 13 municipalities—Mexico, Guadalupe Hidalgo, Atzcapotzalco, Tacuba, Tacubaya, Mixcoac, Cuajimalpa, San Angel, Coyoacan, Tlalpam, Xochimilco, Milpa Alta, and Ixtapalapa.

The first includes the City of Mexico and its immediate suburbs, and the remaining 12 the surrounding town, villages, and agricultural centers. About one-half of the population in the district outside of the City of Mexico is of Indian origin, and is engaged in agriculture.

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Photo by Waite—Mexico City.

CITY OF MEXICO LOOKING SOUTH FROM THE CATHEDRAL.

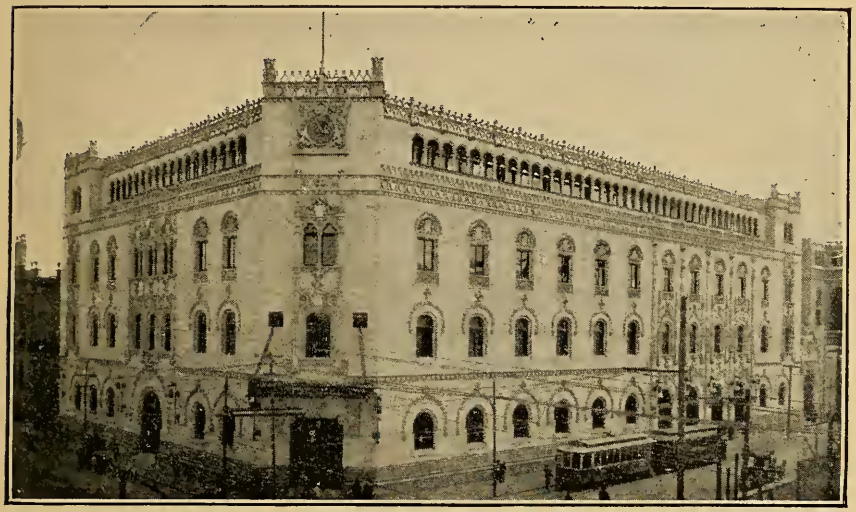
A superb view of the city and surrounding country is obtained from the cathedral towers, 204 feet above the street level. The block to the right is one of the busiest business sections. The square in the foreground is part of the main plaza and the starting point of all the street-car lines of the city. The large building to the left is the city hall, the lower floor of which is used for commercial purposes.

Prior to 1903 the form of government in the Federal District was somewhat similar to the territorial government in force in the District of Columbia about thirty-odd years ago.

The organic act for the government of the Federal District was approved March 26, 1903, and went into effect July 1 of the same year.

Under its provisions the immediate government of the District is in the hands of three officials who, together, compose the Superior Council of District Government. These officials are the Governor of the Federal District, the President of the Superior Health Board, and the Director-General of Public Works.

This form of government bears a marked resemblance to that at present in force in the District of Columbia. This resemblance is, however, more superficial than real.



(Photo by Waite, Mexico City.)

NEW POST-OFFICE, CITY OF MEXICO.

The cornerstone of this building was laid by President Diaz on September 14, 1902, and it was opened to the public in 1907. The cost was $1,500,000 and it was erected in accordance with the plans of the Italian architect, Adamo Boari. The post-office occupies a central location, and covers an area of about 40,000 square feet.

In the District of Columbia the residents have no vote upon any question nor any voice whatever in the government, while in the Mexican Federal District they elect many of the minor officials and have considerable weight in the management of local affairs. In the District of Columbia the final determination of affairs of consequence is in the Senate and House Committees on the District, while in Mexico it is with the President of the Republic. The organic act, article 19, says:

> The political government and municipal administrative of the District shall be in charge of the Executive of the Union, through three officials, who shall be dependent upon the Department of the Interior, etc.

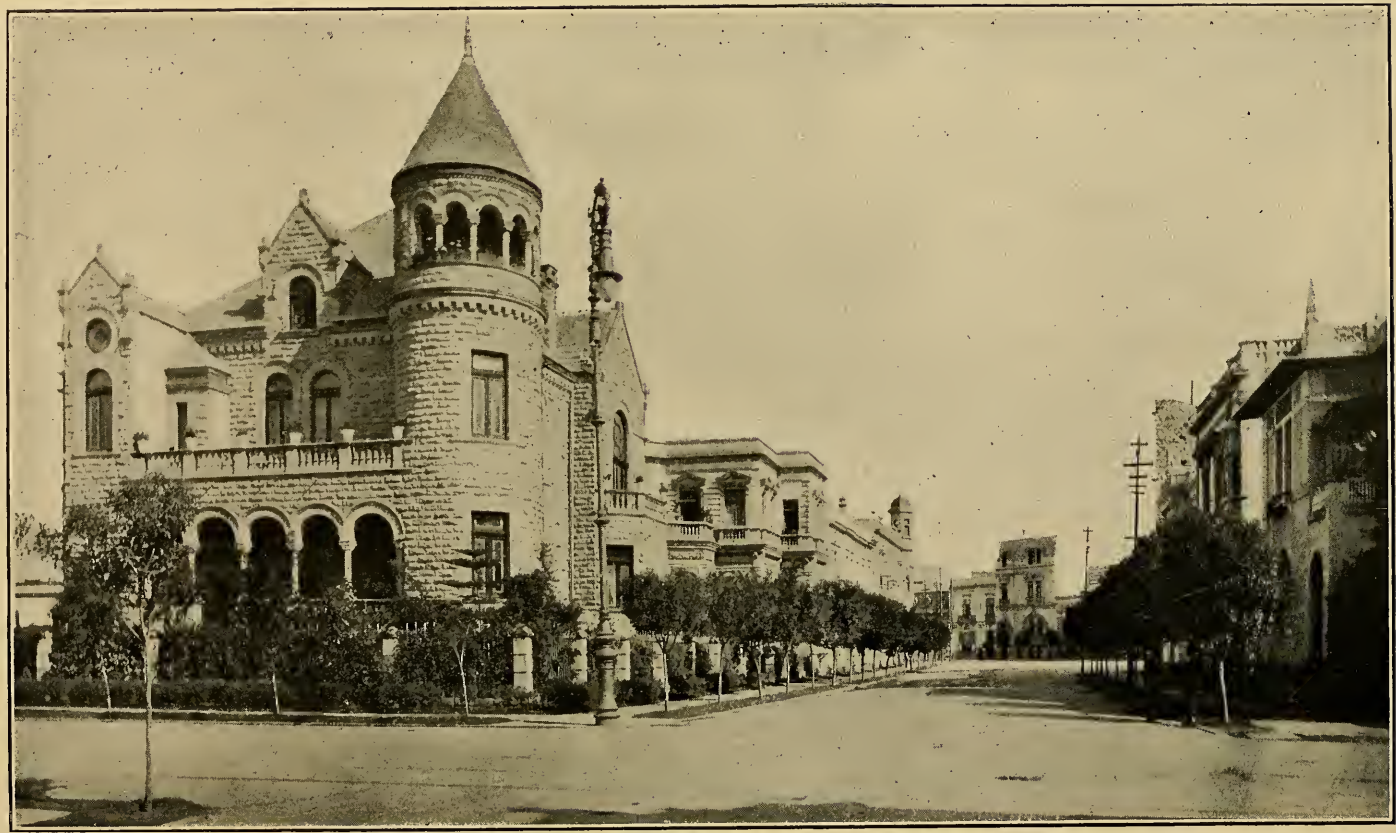


Photo by Waite—Mexico City.

VIEW OF COLONIA JUAREZ, CITY OF MEXICO.

The addition to the western part of the City of Mexico, known as "Colonia Juarez," is a fashionable residential section of the capital. It enjoys all modern improvements, such as asphalted streets, electric lights, and a sewerage system. The streets are lined with rows of shade trees.

In the District of Columbia all administration is by the three Commissioners acting jointly or by majority of the three. As a matter of convenience, the Commissioners do apportion the several departments among themselves, and one of these is especially appointed as an engineer in charge of streets, buildings, etc., yet in theory it is the board and not the individual member which acts. In Mexico each of the three officials is for the most part independent and alone responsible in his own department. This responsibility is limited by the right of the Superior Council—that is, of the three officials acting together—"to revise, confirming, reforming, or revoking the judgments of each one of the members of the Council, whenever these judgments are called in question." The other duties of the Superior Council are advisory merely. It may propose changes in the District law or administration, rules for the government and organization of officers and public services. It may suggest improvements in works of public utility, such as water supply, drainage, sanitation, opening or widening streets, or the creation of special commissions to study and report upon such matters. The Council has a general supervision of the making of contracts for public works, but all such contracts must be submitted for final approval to the higher authority.

(Photo by Waite, Mexico City.)

LETTER CARRIER, MEXICO CITY.

In the fiscal year of 1908 over 195,000,000 pieces of mail were handled by the Mexican post-office department.

The Governor of the District, the Director-General of Public Works, and the president of the Superior Health Board is each the head of his own department and responsible for its work, but the subordinate officers and employees are appointed by the Chief Executive of the Republic. The three heads must each be a Mexican citizen, more than 25 years old, and not an ecclesiastic.

The Governor of the District is the chief political authority in the District. He makes public and enforces all laws, decrees, and rules emanating from higher authority. He has special charge of the police and fire department, imposition of penalties for violation of ordinances, penal establishment, civic festivities, public diversions, plays, sale of intoxicating liquors, hotels and restaurants, street cars and cabs, the civil register, and of the inspection of weights and measures.

The Director-General of Public Works has special charge of the water supply, streets and roads, parks, monuments, municipal lighting, drainage and street cleaning, public buildings not under direct Federal control, cemeteries, construction, repair and maintenance of slaughterhouses and markets, inspection of building operations, and of woods, lands, commons, and other communal property.

The president of the Superior Board of Health has charge of all sanitary works as provided by the sanitary code, and, in addition, of general sanitary inspection, especially of the hygienic and sanitary condition of slaughterhouses, markets, and cemeteries, and the introduction of meats from other sections.

The popular element in government is preserved in the Federal District through the preservation of the ayuntamientos or town councils. Each of the 13 municipalities into which the District is divided has its own ayuntamiento, composed of councilors elected by popular vote for four years. To be a councilor one must be a Mexican citizen, resident within the municipality, in full enjoyment of civil and political rights, more than 25 years of age, and not an ecclesiastic.

The ayuntamiento of the municipality of the city of Mexico is composed of 21 members, of Tacubaya 11, and of each of the other municipalities 7. Each ayuntamiento elects from among its members a president and a vice-president who hold office for two years.

The law requires that the ayuntamiento shall be consulted by the Ministry of the Interior, the Governor of the District, the director-general of public works, and the president of the health board, as the case may be, upon matters of general importance in the municipality, such as water supply and distribution, local sanitary work, establishment of new settlements, exploitation or sale of woods, lands, and commons. They must also be consulted as to contracts for the execution of any of these works and as to all other contracts of a municipal

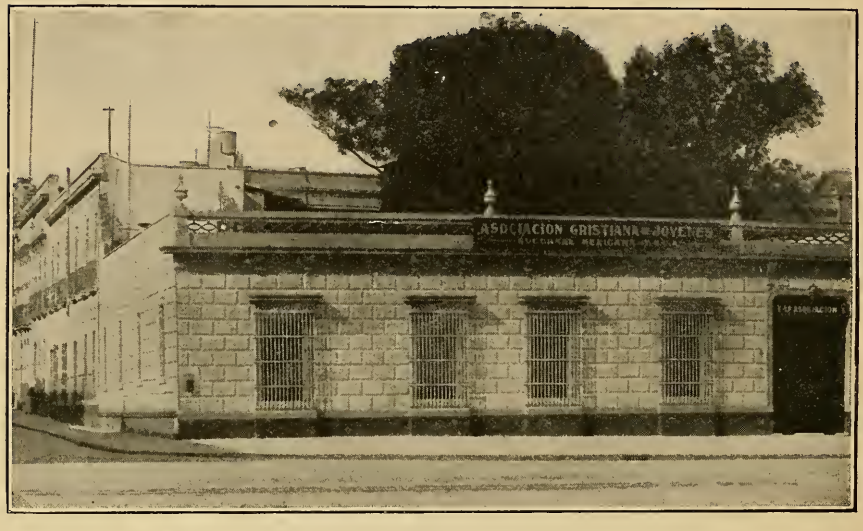
Photo by Waite—Mexico City.

STREET IMPROVEMENT, MEXICO CITY.

The city contains many miles of well-paved and asphalted streets. During recent years great improvements have also been made on the suburban roads, many of which are shaded by handsome old trees draped with garlands of Spanish moss.

character having a duration of five years or more, or which call for a total expenditure of 100,000 *pesos* ($50,000) or more, or an annual expenditure of 25,000 *pesos* ($12,500).

In all these matters the ayuntamientos have by a two-thirds vote the right of veto. The effect of this veto is to suspend for four months the project or contract in question. At the end of the four months if the ayuntamiento still opposes the proposition by a vote of three-fourths of its members, the matter is submitted to the President of the Republic for final solution.



(Photo by Waite, Mexico City.)

YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION, MEXICO CITY.

The building of this world-wide association is located on Puente de Alvarado street, near the Central Railway Station, and is the property of the Mexican branch of the society. Throughout the Republic there are 6 organizations, with 4 paid secretaries and about 1,500 members. The association has railroad branches and educational departments for boys and men.

Mexico City has 353 public schools maintained at government expense and nearly 200 private institutions of learning. Of the former, 13 are professional and technical institutes.

The climate of Mexico is delightful. In summer the maximum temperature reached is not higher than 80° F. This occurs in April and May and from 2 to 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The mornings and evenings are cool, the thermometer sometimes falling to 50°. The coldest months are generally November and December, where for a few hours the thermometer may fall within five or six degrees of freezing. The mean temperature of the summer months is about 65°, and for the winter months 54°. The annual variations for the several seasons is comparatively small, but the daily variation is often considerable, the temperature rising or falling twenty or more degrees in a few hours.

Photo by Waite—Mexico City.

PRIMARY SCHOOL BUILDING, MEXICO CITY.

Recently $3,500,000 was set aside by the Mexican authorities for the construction of new school buildings. The Government is putting forth every possible effort to provide educational opportunities as the safeguards of the liberty of the Republic.

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The Mexican capital is becoming one of the most beautiful cities of the world, but it is a city in process of being made over. Unlike Buenos Aires or Chicago, which are new, Mexico City is very old. The work of improvement is the work of tearing down and rebuilding. This work goes on constantly and always to fit in with a general large plan, which looks to the whole and not to the particular.

An English writer, Mr. PERCY MARTIN, says of it:

> The aspect of the city to-day is suggestive of one-half being pulled down while the other half is being built up. But there can be no question as to what it will be when the destruction stage has ceased and the construction is complete. Mexico will be a beautiful city in every respect—worthy of the superb climate with which the country is blessed, worthy of the enterprising Government which is directing affairs, and with plenty to show for the millions which are being expended upon its adornment. Already sufficient has been effected to evince that Mexico City will be more beautiful than Paris, more admirably planned than Vienna, and a distinct improvement upon Berlin.

Situated in a valley, with mountains on all sides, the location is ideal. To the stranger the most beautiful construction in the City of Mexico is the Paseo de la Reforma, or the Paseo, as it is usually called. This is undoubtedly one of the handsomest driveways in the world, and in a few years will be incomparably finer than the Prater, Unter den Linden, the Champs Elysées, or the Nevsky Prospect, the better-known show ways of Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and St. Petersburg. It extends, over two and a half miles in length, from the center of the residential part of the city to the foot of Chapultepec.

The carriage way is broad, shaded by two rows of trees on each side, between which is a wide promenade. At intervals the Paseo expands into a *glorieta*, a small circular park 400 feet in diameter, around which are handsomely carved stone benches. In the center of the *glorietas* are well-kept and beautiful flower beds. In the first *glorieta* within the city stands the colossal equestrian statue of CHARLES IV of Spain, said to be the largest bronze in the world.

There are also colossal statues of Columbus and of Cuauhtemoc and Juarez. In fact, each *glorieta* will have several such statues of Mexican celebrities, which will be presented by the several Mexican States.

The statue of Charles IV was first placed in 1804 on its pedestal in the Plaza Mayor, where it remained until 1824, when it was removed to the patio of the university, whence it was moved to its present site. It is a solid bronze, 15 feet 9 inches high, weighing over 30 tons. The King is dressed in royal robes, wearing on his head a wreath of laurel and holding in his right hand the scepter. The horse is in the act of walking, the left fore foot and right hind foot being raised. The sculptor was MANUEL TOLSA.

The statue of Columbus was one of the first monuments erected on the continent he discovered, and one of the handsomest. He stands

Photo by Waite—Mexico City.

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE PASEO DE LA REFORMA, CITY OF MEXICO.

The notable equestrian statue of Charles IV in the foreground is the oldest in the city and faces the Paseo, which is 2 miles in length and leads to the gates of Chapultepec. Six circles, each 400 feet in diameter and surrounded by stone benches, adorn the avenue at appropriate distances. This boulevard was laid out in 1864 by Maximilian, and was completed in 1877. To the right of the statue is Bucareli avenue, opened in 1778.

drawing aside the veil which concealed the New World. The base is ornamented by basso-relievos picturing incidents in the life of the Great Admiral, and at the four corners stand life-size figures in bronze of Padre Marchena of La Rabida, Padre Fray, Diego Dehesa, Fray Pedro de Gante, and Fray Bartoleme de las Casas.

The statue of Cuauhtemoc represents the plumed and feathered warrior standing upright in the act of drawing an arrow from his quiver.

STATUE OF CUAUHTEMOC, CITY OF MEXICO.

The beautiful statue of Cuauhtemoc, the last emperor of the Aztecs, was designed by Francisco Jimenez, a Mexican artist, and erected in the Paseo de la Reforma at a cost of $40,000. On each anniversary of its dedication, August 21, celebrations are held at the base of the monument, addresses being made in the Aztec language. The bronze figure represents the well-poised body of the emperor in the act of throwing a spear, symbolic of his refusal of the terms of peace offered by Cortez.

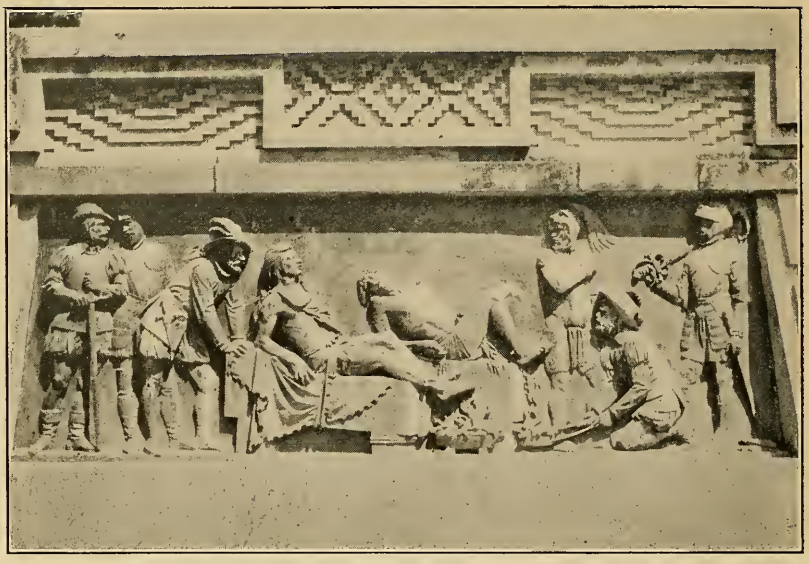
The hill of Chapultepec overlooking the city is said to have been the site of the summer palace of the Montezumas. After the conquest the Spanish viceroys built on the crest of Chapultepec the great castle which stands to this day and is the summer residence of President Diaz. Surrounding the castle are magnificent cypress woods, the finest grove on the continent. The view from the terrace of the castle is one of the world's famous sights.

Another of the famous sights of Mexico is the Alameda, a park of about 40 acres extent. This was in old times an Indian market and also a place of execution. It was at one time inclosed by a high

Photo by Waite—Mexico City.

STATUE OF CULUMBUS, PASEO DE LA REFORMA, CITY OF MEXICO.

This statue is the work of Enrique Carlos Cordier, a French artist, and was presented to the city by Don Antonio Escandon, a Mexican philanthropist, the unveiling ceremonies being held in August, 1877. It represents Columbus in the act of drawing away the veil which hides the New World.



BAS-RELIEF ON ONE SIDE OF THE STATUE OF CUAUHTEMOC.

The scene depicts the torturing of the Aztec emperor, Cuauhtemoc, and the cacique of Tacuba, by roasting their feet over a slow fire, in order to force them to reveal to the Spanish conquerors the hiding place of their treasures. The cacique could not conceal his suffering, at which the emperor rebuked him with the words: "Do you think, then, that I am taking my pleasure in my bath?"

PALACE OF THE PRESIDENT, CHAPULTEPEC, MEXICO.

This historic structure is situated on the eastern summit of Chapultepec (hill of the grasshoppers) overlooking the valley with the city in the foreground and the snow-capped volcanoes of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl in the rear. A fine roadway ascends the hill to the castle, which is also reached by an elevator. At the foot of the hill is a large spring that forms part of the water supply of the capital. In the surrounding park is a fine grove of ancient moss-covered cypress trees, one of which is 45 feet in circumference and 200 feet high.

Photo by Waite—Mexico City.

AN AVENUE IN CHAPULTEPEC PARK, CITY OF MEXICO.

wooden fence, and later by a stone wall with a moat around the wall. About twenty years ago the fences and walls were removed and the moat filled up. Since then the whole park has been made over, until it is now a most beautiful place of promenades. Here are held the *fiestas* on national holidays.

One of the most important, if not the most important, municipal work undertaken in the city of Mexico has been the drainage of the valley. This is a very old project and antedates the conquest in the colonial period. Work was at times pushed and then abandoned, and

LA VIGA CANAL, FEDERAL DISTRICT, MEXICO.

This is an artificial and navigable waterway, through which the waters of Xochimilco and Chalco lakes discharge into the lower level of Lake Texcoco. It is the route over which a large traffic in vegetable and other products is carried on between the capital and the outlying country. On Sunday afternoons and holidays the canal is alive with pleasure seekers and tourists.

so it was during the earlier years of the Republic. Decisive action dates from the formation of the Drainage Board in 1886, since which the work has been continuously and intelligently carried on to a final completion a few years ago. It comprehends an outlet from the low-lying valley to carry off the surplus water fall and drainage for which nature has not provided. The Valley of Mexico is a great undrained bowl set round with a rim of high hills and mountains. This rim has been tunneled and into the tunnel are carried the waters of the Vega Canal which is the final receptacle of the surplus water and city

drainage. The drainage itself is by means of an underground system similar to that of most other modern cities. It differs in this that the natural fall being insufficient to carry off the matter or to flush the pipes by gravity, an artificial method of accomplishing these ends was necessary. This is done through a supplemental water supply derived from the springs surrounding the valley, which is gathered and pumped under pressure through the drain pipes, through the larger collecting channels into the canal, and through the tunnel out of the valley. The work begun by the Board in 1886 was continued by a Commission appointed in 1895 and by the Board of Directors appointed in 1896.

A SCENE ON THE VIGA CANAL, FEDERAL DISTRICT, MEXICO.

The Viga Canal is 16 miles long and 30 feet wide, with an average depth of 6 feet. It has continued in use for more than two centuries. Many historic and picturesque places border its banks and make it one of the most interesting spots in the valley of Mexico.

The great cathedral of Mexico, the most pretentious church on the continent, stands first in architectural interest among the many fine buildings which have given to the capital the name of "City of Palaces."

The corner stone was laid in 1573 upon the site occupied by the great Aztec temple which was destroyed by Cortez in 1521. A small church was two years later erected upon the site, which in turn gave place fifty years later to the foundations of the present cathedral. The walls were completed in 1615, the roof in 1623, when the first mass

was said. In 1667 the church was dedicated, and in 1791 the towers were finished, and the building was finally completed about twenty years later.

The cathedral occupies an extent of 374 feet by 187 feet. The architecture is composite. The facade on the side from which the

(Photo by Waite, Mexico City.)

MOUNTED POLICE, MEXICO CITY.

The mounted police force, which patrols the outlying districts and suburbs of the capital, consists of highly disciplined and well-trained horsemen.

towers rise is divided by massive buttresses into three divisions representing the three Greek orders. The lower is Doric, next above, a somewhat exaggerated Ionic, and the upper part Corinthian. The material is a gray stone relieved by statues, friezes, bases, and capitals of white marble, which gives an agreeable color effect. The

towers are 204 feet in height. Two massive buttresses joined together but hidden by a wall form the first body of each tower, which rises to the height of the side entrances. From thence the second body springs, ornamented with columns and semicircular openings. The third body, lighter in effect and angular, is encircled by a balustrade. The two lower bodies are Doric and the upper Ionic. Each tower is capped by a bell-shaped dome. In the west tower hangs the great bell, Saint Mary of Guadelupe, which is 18 feet high. Above the whole rises the great and imposing dome surmounted by a slender and graceful lantern.

MOORISH PAVILION, CITY OF MEXICO.

The "Pabellon Morisco," or Moorish Building, which stands on the southern side of the Alameda, facing Avenida Juarez, is constructed of iron and glass, and was formerly the Mexican Building at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. For twenty-five years it was the office of the National Lottery, but is now used as a café.

The interior forms a Latin cross. Five naves, converging to the center, represent various styles of vaulting; cloistered and groined in the fourteen chapels, seven on each side; spherical and supported by curvilinear triangles in the processional naves; and semicircular with lanterns in the central and cross naves. The three last naves are supported by twenty handsome Doric half columns. The whole interior is a marvel of carving and gilding.

The National Palace, occupying an entire square, fronting nearly 700 feet on the Plaza Mayor, is the Capitol of the Republic. It contains the President's offices and those of several executive departments, and is the meeting place of the Senate. The House of Deputies occupies what was formerly the Yturbide Theater, but which has been

remodeled for legislative purposes. The Palace occupies the side of the House of Cortez, which was destroyed in 1692. The present building was begun soon after, and has been added to from time to time. The last additions are quite recent. The outside is uninteresting, presenting long white walls which suggest no idea of the interior magnificence of the halls and salons.

The Palace has three entrances from the Plaza Mayor. The most noted room is the Hall of the Ambassadors, an apartment of regal dimensions and adornment. The Hall of the Constitution is also a magnificent room. Over the main gateway of the Palace hangs the Liberty Bell of Mexico, rung by Hidalgo to call the people to arms in 1810.

The National Library was formerly the old Church of St. Augustin, and is one of the fine buildings of the city. It has gardens on each side and contains 200,000 volumes, of which many are very old and valuable.

The National Museum is one of the world's great museums. Its collection of ancient Mexican art and other relics is known to all scholars.

The School of Fine Arts is a fine gallery of painting and sculpture.

Among the most noted churches are San Pablo, Santa Vera Cruz, Santa María Martír, Santa Ana, Santa Cruz Acaltan, San Miguel, San José, Santo Domingo, San Augustin, San Diego, and Nuestra Señora de la Concepción.

Other fine buildings are the Mining Palace, the Post-Office building, Palace of Justice, and the Mint.

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